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TAGS: [PREF](#) [PTER](#) [PBTS](#) [PGOV](#) [IZ](#) [SY](#)
SUBJECT: KRG PRESIDENT BARZANI ON NATIONAL RECONCILIATION,
TRIBES AND SYRIA

Classified By: Classified By Regional Coordinator Jess Baily for reason
s 1.4 (b) and (d).

This is a Regional Reconstruction Team (RRT) Cable.

11. (C) SUMMARY: Senior Adviser to Ambassador pressed KDP Leader Barzani on need for cooperation on key national issues like hydrocarbons and national political accommodation. He also laid down a marker on Kurdish expansion in the Sinjar area south of Mosul. Barzani struck a pessimistic note about efforts at national political reconciliation but promised his continued support to the process and floated the idea of a national conference in Erbil sometime after the upcoming Eid al-Fitr holidays. He described his own dialogue with tribal leaders west of Kirkuk and intimated that the U.S. had been slow to respond to their offer to combat Al-Qaeda. He also claimed that the KDP did not want to spark sectarian conflict and pledged to investigate a KDP leader's letter requesting the expulsion of 133 Arab families from Sinjar. He said Syria continued to play a destructive role in Iraq as Bashar Al-Asad has regained his confidence after initial fears following the fall of Saddam's regime. But Barzani believed that only fear, money and the Hariri tribunal could affect Syrian behavior.
END SUMMARY

National Reconciliation

12. (C) Senior Adviser Pearce, accompanied by Erbil RRT Team Leader Baily, Colonel HR McMaster, and Major Joel Rayburn, met for 90 minutes October 7 with Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) President Massoud Barzani at Barzani's office in Salahuddin. Barzani's son, KRG intelligence service head Masrur Barzani, also attended. Senior Adviser explained that he had returned recently to Iraq and joined Col. McMaster and Maj. Rayburn on a tour of the center and north of the country. Ambassador Crocker had suggested that Pearce visit with Barzani to review the political process and seek KDP support on the many tough issues that lay ahead.

13. (C) Barzani began by expressing some chagrin that Crocker and General Petraeus had made little mention of Kurdistan's achievements during last month's congressional hearings. But, Barzani said, the Kurds had no hesitancy about their alliance with the United States. He went on to paint a pessimistic picture of national reconciliation efforts. Other Iraqi political leaders had not made clear choices. Often they agree in private, then contact their foreign sponsors, get a different signal, and then shift positions in public. The current violence in Iraq had flared out of the ashes of 1,400 years of history. It was time to extinguish those fires. Before the war, the opposition to Saddam had agreed to eliminate the causes of conflict by creating a democratic, federal Iraq. But now, extremists dominated both the Sunni and Shi'a parties and there was no place for democratic and liberal forces. Asked whether that meant he had concluded political accommodation was not possible,

Barzani replied only that nothing is impossible.

¶4. (C) The senior adviser said Kurdish help was essential on important national issues. For example, on security, the police academy in Erbil was an excellent model for similar facilities in the rest of the country. Barzani replied that Kurds were ready to help; many policemen from other parts of the country had attended courses in Erbil. Despite this good will, many Arabs resisted help from the Kurds. Such help causes people who view Kurds as second class citizens to feel shame.

¶5. (C) Barzani lashed out at comments by Minister of Oil Sharistani questioning the legality of the KRG,s contracts with international oil companies. &He is the one stealing oil out of Iraq,8 he declared. Senior Adviser replied that Ambassador Crocker had specifically requested that he raise the hydrocarbons issue with Barzani. Crocker and Petraeus had made a huge effort in Washington to maintain the US commitment to Iraq. That meant we needed to engage all Iraqis without exception. And we need the Kurds, cooperation on hydrocarbon issues. Pearce said the Ambassador would be engaging further with the Kurdish leader on the issue.

¶6. (C) Later in the meeting, Barzani bemoaned the lack of leadership among the Sunni. &They cannot have one leg in terror and one in the political process,8 he said, pointing to a recent statement of sympathy for Al-Qaeda made by Harith al-Dhari, the leader of the Muslim Scholars Association, on Al-Jazeera television. He also noted the particularly negative effect of an Egyptian-sponsored conference in Cairo in late April, at the time of the Sharm al-Shaykh Neighbors Conference. He claimed the intelligence services of Egypt,

BAGHDAD 00003416 002 OF 003

Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Turkey were behind the conference and that they had invited Saddamists and mercenaries. Former Prime Minister Iyad al-Allawi, he said, later admitted to having made a mistake by attending. Occurring at the same time as the Sharm meeting, the conference had sent a discouraging negative message.

Help with the Tribes

¶7. (C) Pearce said the Ambassador also sought Barzani,s views and assistance regarding signs that tribes to the west of Kirkuk seemed increasingly interested in helping Coalition Forces to combat Al-Qaeda. Barzani said that four or five months ago, tribal leaders from these areas and those southeast of Mosul had met with him in Erbil to gain support for clearing those areas where no U.S. or Iraqi forces operate. Asked whether these tribes were ones enjoying traditionally good relations with the KDP, he said KDP meets with all tribes, except those who are &terrorists or Baathists.8 (Kurdish region interior minister Karim Sinjari told the group in a separate meeting that the tribal representatives included leaders of the Jiburi and Ubayd tribes.) The tribes felt they had two choices: receive support and deny a safe haven to terrorists or pick up their bags and leave. These contacts were followed up with a meeting in Baghdad in mid-August that Barzani claimed was attended by MND-N BG Wiercinski and a representative from MNC-I. Barzani wondered why the U.S. had procrastinated for three or four months in responding to their requests for support. Senior Adviser assured Barzani that the U.S. was looking into the issue, would like the KDP,s support and cooperation in the process, and would be back in touch with him.

Avoid Flashpoints like Sinjar

¶8. (C) Pearce raised with Barzani a potential flash point in the Sinjar district of Ninewa. On U.S. delegation,s October

6 visit to Tal Afar, they had learned that local KDP leader Sarbast had issued a letter calling on GOI authorities in the region to expel 113 Sunni Arab families from Sinjar. Sarbast had claimed this was within Kurdish rights under Article 58 of the Constitution, and the KDP would continue to press the issue. Senior adviser had told Sarbast that he was not going to debate the Constitution with him. But we do not expect the KDP, an important national political force in Iraq, to do anything that will exacerbate communal tensions at a time when the focus of our political efforts is to reduce them. Barzani, Masrur, and other KDP officials in the room all maintained that this was the first they had heard of the Sarbast order. Local officials, Barzani said, do not have the authority to make such decisions. He pledged an immediate investigation into the matter because the letter did not reflect the KDP policy. &The KDP will not be a cause of sectarian problems.8

Role of Syria

19. (C) Asked about Syrian policy on Iraq, Barzani indicated that Damascus continued to play a &destructive role.8 He recalled meeting President Bashar Al-Asad two times after the U.S. invasion in 2003. At that time, Asad was shaken by the toppling of Saddam,s regime and worried that Syria would be next. Syria began playing a particularly negative role in early 2004 as the situation deteriorated in Iraq. Syrian self-confidence grew as Iraq,s difficulties increased. Asad had come to believe that the U.S. would not touch him, because the U.S. was convinced that the only alternative would be a government led by the Muslim Brotherhood or similar groups. He noted that Syria,s relationship with Iran played a role in Asad,s calculations, but said Syria is now the junior partner. Pressed as to what might induce Syria to change its behavior, he replied, &fear and money.8 Barzani said the tribunal investigating the Hariri assassination also had Syria worried.

Possible National Conference in Erbil

110. (C) Discussing the prospects for national political accommodation, Barzani floated the idea of hosting a national conference of political parties in Erbil after the holidays. The moderate parties must unite, he said. &There is no other solution.8 He said that the conference idea was in its initial stages and offered no details. Nor did Barzani seek U.S. endorsement. (Note: the KDP paper &Khabat8 published a photo of the meeting with a caption highlighting that Barzani discussed his idea for such a conference as well as &arming the tribes.8) On the broader issue of

BAGHDAD 00003416 003 OF 003

reconciliation, he offered his full support but added ~ to expect much8 from a &humble ally.8

Comment

111. (C) Barzani reiterated the same themes about national reconciliation efforts as he did when CODEL Baucus visited on September 16, with the Kurds being caught in an intractable struggle between extremist Sunni and Shi,a foes who have not yet decided whether they want to get along. He pledged his commitment to the process and floated the idea of a national conference in Erbil, perhaps a way of highlighting his role as a powerbroker. On more local reconciliation issues, we will need to coordinate with him to ensure his dialogue with tribes west of Kirkuk dovetails with coalition efforts. The meeting served to lay down a marker on KDP expansionism in Ninewa. We will follow up to see if Barzani,s intervention defuses local tensions in Sinjar over the KDP expulsion request. We find it hard to believe Barzani really knew nothing about the Sinjar 113 families list. We had raised it earlier in the day with Mosul,s KDP vice governor, Khosro

Goran. Goran presumably briefed Masrur and Massoud immediately afterward. Our guess is that they got caught with their hands in the cookie jar, and feigned surprise at the supposedly rogue actions of a local official.

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